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Chimes & Humoresques

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CHIMES

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PRELUDE

In this contented church the lights are dim,
The organ is playing A Vesper Hymn
And evening scenes crowd in melodious throngs:
  A mountain shepherd pipes a plaintive air;
A forest bird sings mellow, sun-set songs;
  Mild chapel chimes call the righteous to prayer—
What knows, what cares, this audience of wrongs
Where workmen sweat on machines—pounding, grim—
And where the factory whistle is a vesper hymn?

LAMENT

There is truth in the visions of the poets,
But few are those that trust the poets' dreams.
There is a summons in the hymns of the prophets,
But few are those that follow the prophets' psalms.

They live,
That see and follow,
That hear and obey.

They die
That sigh, "How beautiful,"
And then forget.

MIDNIGHT AT THE GRAVE OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

Midnight is coming soon.
Down the mole-colored streets,
Through the dense, black alleys,
To this dark corner,
Midnight is coming soon.

The sleepy trolly lopes by,
Its bumping softened in the furry haze;
Midnight is coming soon,
Soon through the silent, deserted streets—
Soon through the unwholesome, opened-drained alleys—
Soon through the cramped alleys troubled by the urge
of spring—
Midnight is coming soon—
Soon to this quiet corner
Midnight is coming.

A scream,
A woman's scream breaks from the throttled quarters.
Shouts . . . scurrying feet run through the alleys.
A policeman's whistle—
Silence falls . . . midnight is coming soon.

The clanging patrol drives by,
Up a crowded alley whose shadowy windows are full
of craning necks and staring white eyeballs.
Bravely the offenders are loaded
And sated with its prey
The patrol draws slowly away . . .
Midnight is coming soon.

Midnight,
Unseeing, unheeding midnight
Has passed this abandoned corner by
She has passed by the squalor and the sorrow:
She did not pause to see the injustice nor to hear the lies;
Heeding not the lynchings, the burning stakes, the blistering tar,
She did not pause to ease the pain nor to shroud the broken heart.
She brought no comfort
To this hopeless corner:
But on the distant cathedral bell,
She chimes out her death-charmed chant:

All . . . is . . . well . . .
All . . . is . . . well . . .
All . . . is . . . well . . .

A RAILWAY CLERK PAUSES IN GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL

I.

Yesterday I stood in an open green field under the jaunty blue sky:
There the gleaming green calamus blades were waving;
There the red-winged blackbirds were calling "kah-ling, kah-lee."
There on a calamus blade I saw a fresh-born butterfly expanding its glossy black wings in the breeze.
There the wild blue-flags were blooming, in the open, sun-lit field.

II.

Today I stand here.
The straight-edged, tawny pillars hold high the viridescent, forget-me-not blue.
The shining pale sky beats against the iron-fretted eastern windows.
Here comes the care-worn multitude to its daily labor, hurrying, pausing not to worship—
Here passes the confident, tireless masters.
Through here I have heard a gleeful chorus of fresh air children singing and sturdily marching on to the benison of the open green fields.
I have seen khaki-clad columns of soldiers treading down the winding staircase.
I have seen rows of white-capped sailors lining those galleries.
Here I have heard the exotic love songs of red and orange-sashed Hawaiian minstrels,
Here I have heard plantation lullabies sung by mellow-voiced Red Caps.
Here I have paused while all others have hurried on and on.

III.

I have paused here when the lazy warm sunshine slanted in from the west and the city toilers with their treasured days of leisure fled to the lakes and hills.

I have paused here when the faithful train crews, carrying their train kits in their aching hands, were returning from their struggles with frozen switches, the wind and sifting snow.

I have watched here as battle-mawed heroes passed on their way home from the front.

I have watched when the melons of light began to glow and the trooping commuters began to swing down the long-vistaed ramps.

I have watched while the throngs came and loaded the fortuned youth of the city into the long sleepers bounded for the camps on the shore, by the lakes, in the mountains.

I have watched the grease-blacked car inspectors swing their blue lanterns and bob out from underneath the waiting cars.

And I have watched the trains pull out through the black tunnel with its marvelous blue lights and its suspicious-eyed red signals—

Out through the tunnels, across the bridges and over the trestles—

Out beyond the city and along the river side—

Through the fields and up the mountain ledges—

The trains have sped over the ringing steel rails:

On . . . on . . . and on they have rushed, carrying the workers, the masters, the children, the soldiers, the sailors, the minstrels, the wounded, the health-seekers; the careless and the gay; the mourning and the burdened; the wronged and the despised.

On . . . on . . . and on, past the watchful signal towers and past the lifted arms of the semaphores.
On . . . on . . . and on they are drawn.
On to the roadsides where the wild roses are blooming;
On to the open fields where the calamus is waving.

IV.

But today I tarry here and consider the life and the bounties received through you, Oh, Brother Railroad Men.
The thoughtless and the troubled have passed on,
But I tarry today and send out my thanks to you:
Surveyors and engineers who planned the way;
Laborers who gorged the cuts and graded the roadbed;
Drillers, powdermen, mechanics, carpenters, and masons;
Ironworkers, bridge builders, derrickmen;
Bargemen, yardworkers, and signal men;
Conductors, engineers, firemen, brakemen, and switchmen;
Electricians trackmen, and maintainers;
Dispatchers, towermen, operators, clerks—
I thank you all.
The crowds pass on.

V.

Oh Brother Railroad Workers,
I have nothing to give you but my thanks,
I have nothing to offer you but my pledge to play well my small melody in the great Symphony of the Singing Rails.

A CLERK TO HIS ALARM CLOCK

What hand placed you there on the chair beside my bed?
What hand, I say,
What insidious hand placed you there
Where you watch me with your sharp, prying eye,
Where you tick away the night and tick away the day,
Where you have laughed as I was joyfully transported in my dreams?

You have laughed.
While I have sailed the sunny blue Mediterranean in a purple-sailed Phœnician fleet—
While I have floated down the Nile in the amorous arms of a princess—
While I have pondered in the shadowy garden of a Grecian temple—
While with Cæsar I have commanded the tough Roman legions and led the riotous triumphs—
While with the Crusaders I zealously marched—
While with Luther I preached—
While at Valley Forge I suffered—
You have laughed.

What hand placed you there where you try to march the helter-skelter rhythm of my dreams to your metalic Click-tick, Click-tick, Click-tick, Click-tick?
What hand placed you there to snicker at my nightly yearnings for my far-off, reluctant love?
What hand will draw away and try to hide in the vanishing darkness on the morning of the joyful day on which we workmen will free ourselves, and you will wake me for the last time with your hated buzz, rattle, and ring?

A DAY IN WINTER

The muffled world doth lay in fluffed white and dull
grey.
Aside the bluish shades of night are slowly drawn—
Behold, the tardy light climbs thru the hazy dawn—
With gold piled high, the rising sun begins its sway.

The blinding sun is high and shines from out the sky
Of blued blue. The icy silver sends far-flashed
Reflections as to earth long prisms from eaves are
crashed.
The sun, receding, shows that noon is past and by.

The sun beyond the hills has fallen and it fills
The sky with glowing orange . . . paling fast to
grey
As long and blue shadows across the valleys stray.
Crisp white and sombre grey our world rests as fate
wills.

. . . . . .

Oh God, be my light
All thru the coming night.
Oh God, be my sun
Until another day's begun!

THE WINDS, THE BELLS

On, on, ye winds!
Your keen breath sending the cutting sleet
Against the weary trudgers thru the city street.

On, on, ye winds!
Over the fallen wayfarer blow
With thy chilly breath that speaks of death
And bury him in the frozen snow.

On, on, ye winds!
Against the cottage pane rattle the hail.
Sound thy dreadful wail,
Till the lone wife within turns pale.

On, on, ye winds!
Pause not in your flurried flight!
On! on! into the night
Soften thy cruel breath with this message of light:

Strength . . . to the weak!
Warmth . . . to the cold!
Sight . . . to the blind!
Life . . . to the dying!
Peace . . . peace . . . peace . . . to the distressed.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Brightly burn, our Christmas candles three;
Burn, brightly burn;
One for Joseph,
One for Mary,
And one for the infant Jesus,
Brightly burn.

Brightly burn, our Christmas candles three;
Burn, brightly burn;
One for love hymns,
One for peace stars,
And one for the birth of Justice,
Brightly burn.

Light the way, our Christmas candles three;
Light, light the way
For Liberty,
Equality,
And for the Brotherhood of Man—
Light the way!

EASTER

Of Life, and more,
The angels sung.

For Life, and more,
Spring's bells have rung.

To Life, and more,
The earth has sprung.

'TIS SPRING

Softly, gently, my Love touches her harp strings,
Sweetly, tenderly, she sings—
Of love.

Firmly, quickly, I strike my harp long,
As boldly, manfully I chant a song—
Of life.

Together our twanging harps ring;
Together we joyfully sing
Of God's promise of love, of life, fulfilled—
'Tis Spring!

IMPATIENCE

I've tarried long
To hear you sing
Your morning song.
I've tarried long,
Till now (nor wrong)
Birds call on wing:
"I've tarried long,
Too!" Hear, you sing!

REGRET

Love, I passed thee by,
Scorning thy trysting bower,
On self I would rely.
Love, I passed thee by
Heeding not thy cry,
Doubting thy plighted power,
Love, I passed thee by
Scorning thy trysting bower.

TO A LEMON LILY

The wonders that the spring calls forth are naught
To me, unless your countenance I see
Among them all, for you foretell with bee
That was by your rich prophecy soon caught
As I, by spicy softness that has brought
Us hope and sights of love that you decree
Shall rule the summer day with harmony
Not gained by magnates' dross of gold, but sought.

O Lily, wafting fragrance once again
To me, may I bow down to your pale gold,
To your spotless yellow, not to pelf of men,
Discolored by wrongs and blood and death—cajoled
From lives oppressed and broken, lost—I ken,
The fact that you exist has made me bold.

THE FAILURE

Come, come, O Death, I am fully thine:
I met Love cautiously and she left me;
I compromised with Life, he mastered me.
I give my faith and love to thee,
None compromise with thee, O Death!

PRESENTMENT

A shiver blows across my harp
A song stirs from my lips, but dies;
My hands with dread are numb—
Why have you not yet come?
I feel death holds you dumb.
You must not fear; I will arise
And hasten to meet you.
We will start life anew.

THE POOL

I lie as a still pool
That mirrors but her sun's desire
And gives him all her cool,
Clear life to quench his passion's fire.
Then, having taken all, he hides his face
In shame, showering all back with love and grace.

AT PARTING

Each day a lover's dream,
Each hour a silver song,
Each night has Beauty's charm—
When I'm with thee.

Each day will darker seem,
Each hour a thorny prong:
Each night stirs fresh alarm—
When gone from thee.

CITY SCENES

I.

A Morning Prayer

From the board-fenced back yards of a dusty block of
flats,
Through the high, criss-cross clothes lines,
Straight upward grows a young Lombary Poplar
Tree . . .
So may my soul grow towards Thee, O God!

II.

City Children

In a window on a dark side street,
A bowl of crocuses is growing in fiber,
And blooming wanely—
Children of the city.

III.

Flat to Let

Through dingy windows
You look at us
Appealingly
And ask to be given a soul.

IV.

Chewing Gum

I stood on the curb, waiting to cross, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. A young woman, chewing gum, drove by in a racy red roadster. Without signaling she stopped, and held up the long lines of nosing autos and green busses, while she spoke with the Traffic Officer. Her horn honked, her car swung around recklessly, and she was gone.

A few blocks on I saw some laborers digging, picking, cracking, drilling, lifting and loading the solid blue rock from a hole two hundred feet deep, where derricks were swinging carelessly around, and I thought of the chewing gum . . . how it is chewed and chewed until all flavor is gone, and then spat out and trampled upon by the tread of the city . . .

V.

Home-Hunger

Old Andirons in the second-hand store window,
I am hoping to buy you.
I am longing to search out my loved one
So we might drowse and dream together near you
Holding glimmering, glowing fire-logs.

VI.

Dust

Friend,
How often you have tried my forbearance
By so unceasingly wiping the dust off everything.
I think that you must loathe the dust,
Because you unconsciously dread the thought of death.

Let me have
A little disordered corner to myself.
It will remind me that my bones are to fall apart into
a dry heap . . .
And make me humble.

THE HARVEST

1914.

Nations, ye have sown in
Doubt, suspicion, fear and
Hate, in greed and in death;
Merciless the fiat:
Reap . . reap . . reap . .

Woe and desolation,
Trampled fields and vineyards,
Crumbled walls and turrets,
Famines, plagues, and fevers,
Bleaching bones and ashes:
Reap . . reap . . reap . .

Blood and ghoulish glory,
Debts to burden coming
Generations, starving
Mothers, mangled children:
Ripened red your harvest —
Reap . . reap . . reap . .

DISILLUSIONMENT

1914.

A dying poet speaks:

I've played my harp,
I've piped my pipes,
I've sung my songs.

It has been hard to sing my life away;
My body aching, then I sang of joy
And with my soul distressed I sang to free
From war—of peace I never knew, but that
My children and my children's children shall
Inherit now through never ending time.

My harp is mute,
My pipes are still,
My songs forgot—

But what of that? the peace is here to stay.
My child, three days—or is it four?—I've heard
This awful roar of storm that comes no nearer
Nor goes away. No rain; the sun shone some.
I have not heard the river's rushing waves—
But what's that shuffling, hurried tread; the creak
Of cart, the driver's shout—these and the far
Prolonged roll of thunder's moody roar;
And if it were less terrible I could
But say that these are battle's groans for I
Heard them in youth and smelt its fetid breath
Among the ranks. My child, you say that all
My sons were called to go and help to save
The city from the floods. Perhaps they're called
For war. I think I smell the cannons' smoke—
And still, the dreadful sound can be naught else
Except the wrath of grudgeful gods' revenge.
Ah, do not tell me that the peace for which
I worked is—my sons may be murdered,
They may be murderers!

RONDEAU

Mourn not for Rheims: its charm was great,
Its spires rose keen against the sky.
For it mild peasants were taxed high,
The land was kept dark by the prate
Of priests who bowed to lords of state
Until they taught a living lie.
Mourn not for Rheims.

Those old rules now assassinate
Each other; lords and sees, they die.
The dawn of brotherhood draws nigh
And love shall overcome the hate.
Mourn not for Rheims.

SURCEASE

Whence goes the army of the liberated souls
Released by shock of cannon,
Squeezed out by starvation?

If I call them,
Will they leap back to this war-racked world and smite
their deceitful chiefs?

But each soul answers mine: "I am at peace."

TO PROFITEERS

I am an American
Believing in the equality of man,
Believing in the inalienable rights of man,
Believing in the freedom of speech,—
Principles for which my great-great grandfather fought.

You, with your viperous attacks on straight-forward, visioned men loyal to American ideals:
You, with your virulent, blind prosecutions of those who fight for justice:
You, with your tarring, lashing, and lynching of the innocent:
You, with your thieving corporations and packers with their rotten meat for my comrades in the U. S. A.:
You, with your grafters that hide like adders in the folds of my Flag:
You, you damned tories! You deceitful copperheads!
You, you greedy traitors!
Must I call you Americans?

SONNET

I know the hills: How patiently they bear
The cutting of the frosty winter day,
How gladly they give up their rock and clay
That spring may break away from winter's lair,
How willingly they loose the springs and share
Their cooling streams to damp the drought; how they
Yield autumn fruits in their own kindly way;
How silently they bear nor breath a prayer.

The hills! the hills! I know the faith they teach,
The patient love that stays with them through rain
Or sun; through growth or blight, through calm and
each
Long strife. In answer to a new command
I go and I may not return again—
I will not falter while my hills still stand.

HUMORESQUES

INVOCATION

Laugh! Dance!
Laugh! Dance!
Fools,
Dubs,
Pikers,
Laugh and be saved:
Dance and be free!
Laugh, damn you, laugh!

NIGHTMARE

A crowd of women
at a bargain counter
pawing and clawing
over a sale of vivid variegated cravats.

IN AN INSANE ASYLUM

Here I could dance an idyl to the moon,
Or laugh a purple laugh,
Or wear a yellow tie,
Or an orange tie,
Or a red tie,
And not be guyed.

Here I even might have a thought of my own
And not be afraid
That it would disturb
Some one.

AT A CONCERT

Click knit; click knit; click knit; click knit.

Oh, woman, poke me in the eye, so I won't have to be distracted by your pink tangle of yarn when I would rather watch the players.

Click knit; click knit; click knit; click knit.

Oh, woman, poke me in the ear, so I won't have to hear your needles that can't keep time with the music.

Click knit; click knit; click knit; click knit.

APPLAUSE

I hang
Suspended
On the marvelous manly notes that still float through the hall
And grab at the coat tails of the retreating quartet.

ON THE AVENUE

This sophistication—this cynicism, wearies me . . .
Oh to see a bowl of gold fish!
Oh to hear a canary singing!

CHRISTMAS CARDS

Would Christmas
Still be Christmas,
If 'jolly'
Didn't rhyme
With 'holly'?

CHINESE PORCELAINS

I spat in my Love's new blue bowl.
She wept.
Of course, I thought she'd brought it from the Five and Ten Cent Store.
But no.
She wept.
She had paid thirty-five dollars for that Blue and White K'ang-hsi Fish Bowl.
She wept.
I bought her a Ming Glass Jar for her tears.
I weep.

ABSOLUTION

I ate a little sausage,
A sausage perplexingly small . . .

But had I been a generous, big, fat hog,
And had seen them stuff me into such mean little sausages,
Would not I, too, want revenge?

AMBITION

Love, prod me along.
Don't let me become a bachelor like that fat
fellow with the yellow rose in his lapel.

He always swears
when the elevator is out of order, and puffs and
grunts and grows red in the face as he ascends
the stairs.
Love, prod me along.

TRAGEDY

O that I might have
Married you! I like the way
You say "Good morning."

MIRTH

I have come to rest
in the churchyard
alone.
Some day I will be buried here.
When the little roots reach down and tickle me under
the ribs, will I laugh?

LOVE

Some say, "Go that way."
Others, "Come this way."
I will wait for you.

GARDEN

My neighbor has a garden—
scarlet geraniums in red tubs.
Whitewashed stones.
Pick them up.
Throw them.
Hit the dumpy hydrangeas—
faces swollen with mumps
and bandaged.

PERSPECTIVE

Ah, Poetry,
it seems
the closer I hold
you
and the tighter I squeeze
you
the less you tell me.

TO SOME POETS

Push aside your whiskers
so we can hear
what you are talking about.
Come out
from behind those tortoise shell spectacles
so we can see
what you look like.

RESULT

My teachers
were ground to dust—
glorious dust
from which
I,
a sorry flower and frail,
have grown.

VIGIL

My soul,
I lift you tenderly
Lest I drop you
And you should smash.

My soul,
I shield you prudently
Lest the greedy feasters steal you,
My soul, Thou Watermelon.

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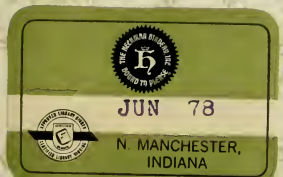
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